DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 223 399 RC 013 668

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TITLE Negotiations in Small School Districts.
PUB DATE Feb 82
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of School Administrators (114th, New Orleans, LA, February 26-March 1, 1982).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Collective Bargaining; *Community Involvement; Decision Making; Educational Administration; *Labor Relations; *Participative Decision Making; Problem Solving; *Small Schools
IDENTIFIERS *Collegial Problem Solving; *Paternalism; School District Size

ABSTRACT

Four paradigms of labor-management relations are found in American small schools: paternalism, collective bargaining, collegial problem solving, and community problem solving. Examination of the conditions under which each is likely to exist and their unique characteristics, reveals the circumstance which will enhance the effectiveness of each. Paternalism, most prevalent in the past, is outdated and only possible in a few communities today. The adversary collective bargaining, developed by large school systems, works with limited success in the small community with its unique communications patterns among community, staff, board, and management, and its flat organizational structure. The collegial problem solving model, which provides for multiple input from staff into the decision-making process, is relatively successful as long as the community does not focus great attention upon the schools. With recent changes in participation patterns, it will not be successful in many communities. The community problem solving model is best suited for small school districts. It provides for channels of communication which meets the unique needs of the smaller community, while at the same time providing for the most effective decisions. It does, however, demand greater time commitment from the board, staff, community, and management. (AH)

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ED223399

NEGOTIATIONS IN SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

By

Ann M. Freers

February 1982

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RC 013668

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Negotiations in Small School Districts
Summary

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Freers' identifies four models of labour-management relations occuring in American small school districts: paternalism, collective bargaining, collegial problem solving, and community problem solving. She argues that the paternalism model is outdated and only possible in a few communities today. The adversary collective bargaining model was developed by large systems, and works with limited success in a small community with its unique communication patterns among community, staff, board, and management, and with its flat organizational structure. The collegial problem solving model, which provides for multiple input from staff into the decision making process, is relatively successful as long as the the community does not focus great attention upon the schools. With recent changes in community participation patterns, however, it will not be successful in many environments. Freers suggests that a community problem solving model is best suited for small school districts. It provides channels of commication which meet the unique needs of the smaller community, while at the same time providing for the most effective decisions. It does, however, demand greater time commitment from the board, staff, community and management.

Negotiations in Small School Districts

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February, 1982

Four paradigms of labor-management relations are found in American small school districts. By examining the conditions under which each is likely to exist and their unique characteristics, one can judge the circumstances which will enhance the effectiveness of each. The basic models of labour-management relations are: paternalism, collective bargaining, collegial problem solving, and community problem solving. The model most prevalent in the past was paternalism. Throughout the sixties and the seventies the collective bargaining model has replaced it as the model of the large city systems was mandated through statute in numerous states. More effective models for the unique circumstances which surround small school districts are collegial and community problem solving.

For purposes of labour-management relations, the unique features of a small school district are:

a. a staff which is in frequent contact both on a formal basis within the system and on an informal basis within the community with the members of the board and management of the district.
b. a management or administrative team which is quite shallow, ie. usually consists of no more than a superintendent, one or two central office personnel, and school principals.
c. a community which is small enough that most people are in touch with some members of the board, the staff, and/or management team on a formal and informal basis.

The traditional labour-management model in education has been paternalism. As figure 1 shows, the paternal figure may be the board, the superintendent, or a combination of the two. This varies by community, the personality of the superintendent, and the nature of the board. Communication lines in such situations are from the top down, though the principals to the teachers and support staff. Given the nature of small communities, however, there will be numerous members of the community and the staff individually communicating with members of the board and the superintendent.

Paternalism, based upon Theory X, with changes in the nature of teacher demands, has generally been replaced in large districts by collective bargaining. Therefore, today paternalism is most frequently found in small school districts. In non-statutory states it has been a continuation of the status quo. In statutory states there has been mutual agreement between the teachers and the superintendent-board that they do not wish to spend time on the issues. Thus, they have agreed to continue paternalism and circumvent collective bargaining.

The limited formal communication channels of paternalism can easily lead to decisions being made on limited information. It is likely that the

quality of the decisions will not be high, for participation will have been limited to a selected few. Without great trust, feelings of efficacy will exist on the part of some; feelings of powerlessness on the part of others. As long as the employees of districts feel that they are being taken care of, and want to be taken care of, it will continue to be an effective model.

A potentially time efficient and authoritarian paradigm is the collective bargaining model, shown in figure 2. In this model both sides determine position, but a large amount of individual action around the table occurs. No role is specified for the community. The model provides for information production by both labour and management. Due to the adversative relationship and the authoritarianism of most unions, the chances for effective communication are greatly reduced. In a small school districts great deal of interaction from both individual community members and staff outside of the bargaining table is likely. This, in turn, will create stress on the process and at the table which the model was not designed to accomodate. The result is likely to be either a return to the paternalism described above, or strong blockages affecting not only the school, but the entire community.

As a result, a third model has developed in a number of small school districts during recent years. In order to deal with teacher demands for a more significant voice in decision making, and in order to build participatory management models, there has been wide-spread use of a collegial decision-making model. The model will frequently behave in a meet and confer manner. In this model, shown as figure 3, there are building level representatives who meet on a general advisory council. At times, the union will also have seats upon this council. The representative group is used to gather concerns or ideas which then are communicated to the administrative group and to the board. It is also used as a sounding board by both the administration and the board for its ideas. Since it provides a formal structure for staff communication, it channels individuals into and through the system. In general, this model has worked well in small school districts as long as there is public belief and trust in the system and in that which is occuring within it.

However, the late seventies and eighties are bringing greater demands from the community for active involvement in school decision-making. The collegial problem solving and collective bargaining models are seen in such communities as excluding a major part of the system. This has resulted in the evolution of the community problem solving model. The community problem solving model, as shown in figure 4, identifies and defines a role for all members in the school community, e.g., the staff, parents, community, management, and the board. It provides channels of communiction which enable each group to generate and to react to identified problems. It effectively uses the unique characteristics of small school districts. In addition to the collegial problem solving structure, it adds to the existing staff structure a similiar organization for parents and community members. This results in two advisory councils to both generate issues and react to them. Both councils are composed of representatives, but are open to all whom they represent as a place to bring concerns and opinions. Both advisory councils have representatives to the management group and spokesmen to the board. The

two councils and the management group provide a consensus and by the time recommendations reach the board effective compromises have generally been developed. Joint meetings of the two advisory groups and the management group can also be easily effected. Thus, a board member or superintendent approached by individual staff members or parents can indicate willingness to listen, but also channel the individual to the councils, indicating that in that way they will have a much stronger voice.

There are, however, some factors which must be considered if the community problem solving model is to be used. Just as a dictatorship is more efficient than an oligarchy, and an oligarchy is more efficient than a democracy, so too is paternalism more efficient than either collective bargaining or collegial problem solving, and all are more efficient than the community problem solving paradigm which demands major commitments from all involved. Community problem solving, however, results in the highest quality decisions in that decisions supported by the total school community and developed through input from all affected groups will result in higher quality during the initiation and of greater strength in the implementation. Additional factors include the constraints that community problem solving is only possible within small school districts or in a highly decentralized system with identified communities. This is a function of size and identity. The model demands ease of use of formal communication channels, a condition only possible within flat organizational structures, and it demands involvement from large segments of staff and community, a condition only possible when numbers are smaller. Most of all, the model demands belief that consensus, not confrontation or coerciveness, is the way to build the strongest system.

Figure 1
Paternalism

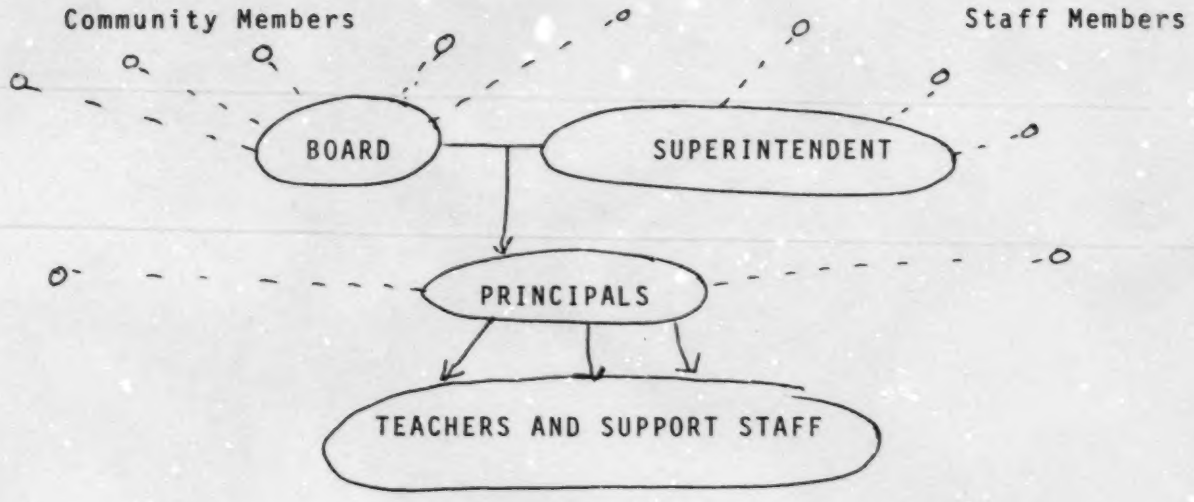

Figure 2
Collective Bargaining

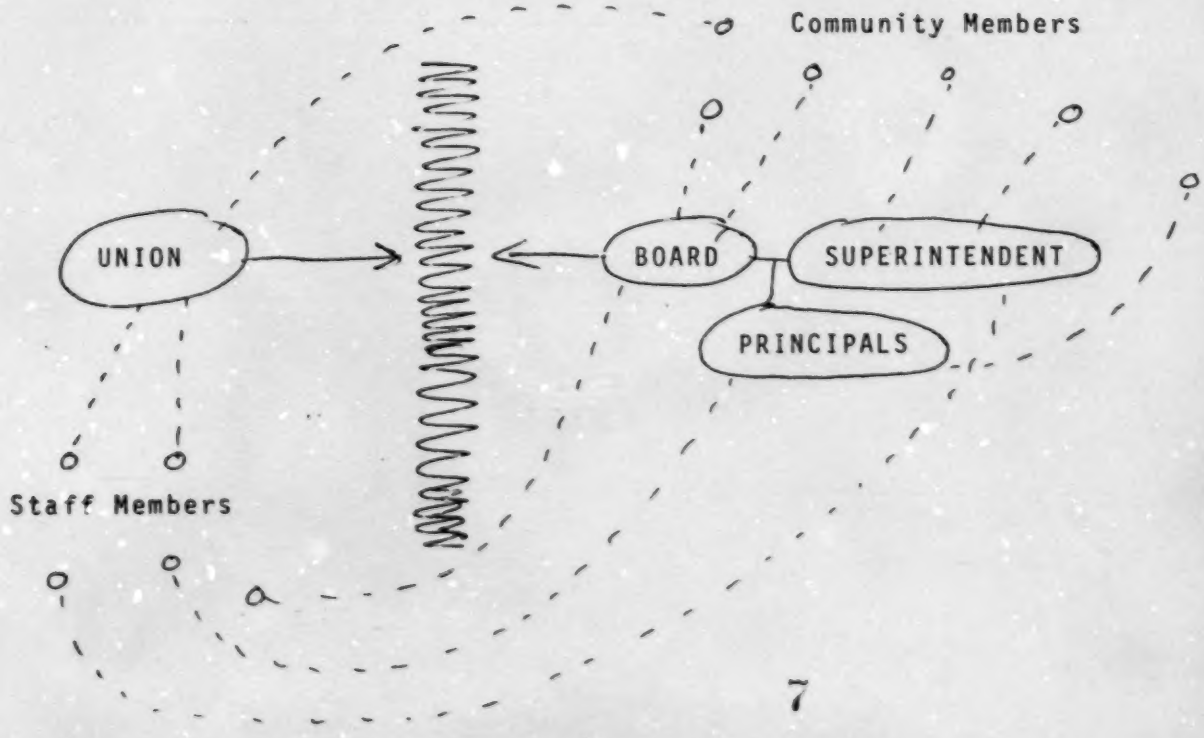

Figure 3
Collegial Problem Solving

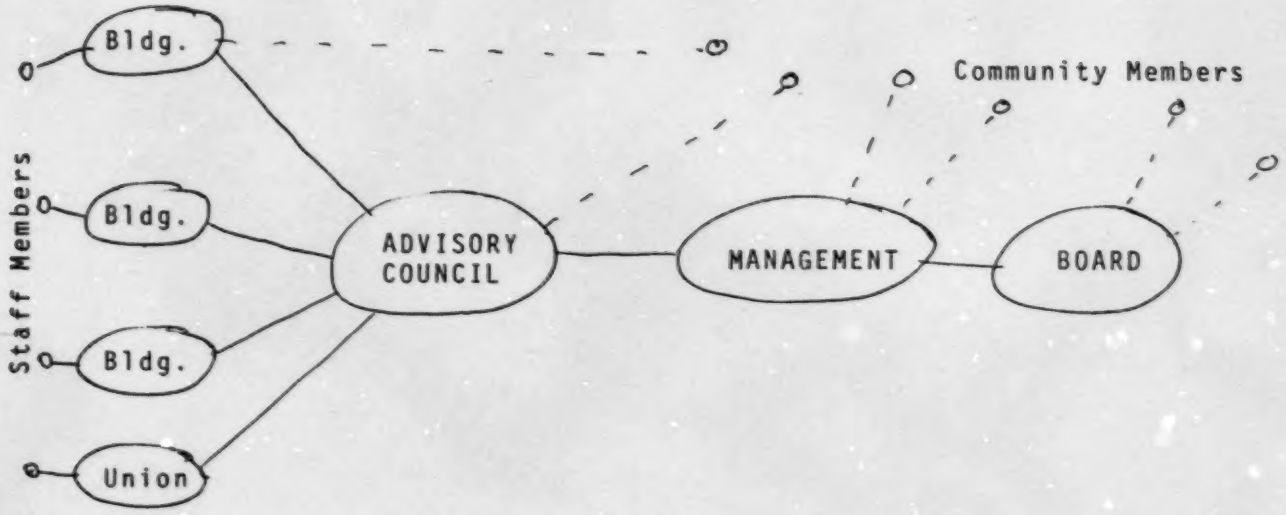

Figure 4
Community Problem Solving